

Hartsville--Simple Pleasures, Natural Treasures

by Tom Poland

Nature, history, and culture at its Pee Dee Finest

Simple pleasures are the best... An old-fashioned, fountain Coca-Cola... a taste of artesian water--a crisp 50 degrees--bubbling up from an ancient aquifer... A native azalea, its bewitching fragrance sweeter than honeysuckle... spring flowers' shimmering blackwater reflections.

Hartsville, S.C., simplicity. Revel in it.

This beautiful Pee Dee town, a bed-and-breakfast haven stitched to the South Carolina Cotton Trail, resurrects yesteryear's charm. Faulkner may as well have had Hartsville in mind when he wrote, "The past is not dead. In fact, it's not even past." For Hartsville is about simple pleasures of the past. No wonder its homes, history and floral wealth lure wayfarers.

Hartsville's planetary address is 34° 22' N, 80° 04' W. Astride the 34th parallel (as is Los Angeles), Hartsville covers five square miles, within which man transformed 491 acres of virgin pines into downtown Hartsville. Old Sol rains celestial riches here--115 clear days a year--and all that energy feeds gorgeous greenery. "Hartsville is a garden with a town within it," said Trish DeHond, Darlington County Tourism director, quickly confessing she's not the first to say this.

May Roper Coker, of course, built the garden in the '30s. With some hard-working men, a mule and enough sweat to float a steamship, "Miss May" sculpted Kalmia Gardens from "laurel land," embellishing its trails with azaleas, camellias and tea-olives. This arboretum--resting over ancient clays and beach sands--sustains a microcosm of plants extending from the Blue Ridge to the Coastal Plain.

Savor South Carolina's floral diversity. Descend the boardwalk (435 feet, total) down a bluff through Kalmia Gardens across Black Creek, where tannins steep the water dark as tea. See profusions of mountain-laurel, *Kalmia latifolia*, blizzard the bluff white come May. Journey across the creek where Segars-McKinnon Heritage Preserve displays copious sub-tropical vegetation.

Climbing the bluff back to the Thomas Hart house, (built 1820, on the National Register of Historic Places), you'll work up a thirst Sweet Boy's fountain will quench with a Coke mixed from syrup and carbonated water. As it effervesces, study Sweet Boy's curious bottles of terra firma from the world over. Then trek to the museum--a restored post office building also on the National Register of Historic Places. Learn Sonoco's history and see silver from the Eastern Carolina Silver Company. Yes, silver, for Hartsville appreciates the finer things in life. (Rumors hint that more millionaires live here per capita than any place in the United States.)

"There's this notion millionaires live in mansions and drive big cars," said Kathy Dunlap, Hartsville Museum director. "They can also live in 20-year-old homes and drive old cars." Kathy should know. South Carolina's oldest car, the steam-powered Locomobile, sits in the museum. Just outside, native Lawrence Anthony's "The Performance," a steel sculpture sporting a copper patina, celebrates the music, dance and drama flourishing in Hartsville's Center Theater.

The good life. That's Hartsville. Nature, history, gardens and art. Home to Coker College, Sonoco and an ancient seashore. Far from ordinary but close to your wayfaring heart.

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Greater Hartsville Chamber of Commerce
www.hartsvillechamber.org
843-332-6401

